

Appl. No. 10/802,334
Amdt. Dated January 28, 2005
Reply to Office Action of December 23, 2004

REMARKS

Claims 1-29 are pending. In response to the Applicant's previous response, the Examiner issued a final office action, maintaining all rejections. As such, the Applicant is filing this amendment contemporaneously with a Request for Continued Examination (RCE). Claims 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 22, 27, and 28 are herein amended.

The Applicant notes the Examiner's acknowledgement of the information disclosure statement mailed on October 20, 2004 with appreciation.

Statement of Substance of Interview on January 26, 2005

On January 26, 2005, Examiners Pass and Thomas granted the Applicant's attorney the courtesy of a telephonic interview. The purpose of the interview was to discuss primary differences between the cited references and the claimed invention.

In particular, the Applicant noted that the claimed invention defines a "data interface" that enables the "healthcare provider to form an electronic communication link with the payor" to "confirm the patient's eligibility for coverage by the payor", based on identified insurance plan information. The Applicant then noted that Sugiyama merely accesses a database to retrieve a previously stored insurance card image so that image can be compared to a new image for the purposes of checking the "validity" of the card (i.e., making sure the stored card image is the same as the card image currently being presented). The purpose of this comparison is to eliminate disparate treatment between "new patients" and existing or "regular patients", and to check the validity of regular patient cards at given intervals (e.g., col. 1, lines 23-27 and lines 28-30; col. 2, lines 2-11; col. 6, lines 50-51; col. 7, lines 1-7). The Applicant then noted that Sugiyama does not disclose or suggest forming a communication link between a healthcare provider and a payer as recited in the claims.

In addition, the Applicant proposed a claim amendment to more distinctly define the claimed invention, where the payor responds to eligibility confirmation requests sent by the healthcare provider over the link. The healthcare provider can then confirm the patient's

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eligibility for coverage by the payor, prior to the appointment. Examiner Thomas then suggested further amendments to the claim language that he believed would distinguish the claimed invention over the cited references, including "... wherein the payor responds to eligibility confirmation requests sent by the healthcare provider and the healthcare provider confirms the patient's eligibility for coverage by the payor ... over the electronic communication ink." The Applicant agreed that the proposed changes were acceptable.

The Applicant then requested that the finality of the previous office action be withdrawn, so that a forthcoming response with the proposed amendments could be entered. Examiner Thomas indicated that he would not be able to do so, stating that a new search may have to be conducted. As such, the Applicant agreed to file a Request for Continued Examination (RCE). The interview then concluded.

Response to Final Office Action

Claims 1-18, 20-23, and 25-29 were finally rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Burko (U.S. Patent Application Pub No. 20020156672) in further view of Sugiyama (European Patent App No. EP0696006). In addition, claims 19 and 24 were finally rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Burko in further view of Sugiyama in further view of Labelle (U.S. Patent Application Pub No. 20020120476).

The Applicant is herein amending the claims to more distinctly define the claimed invention. In more detail, each of the Applicant's **independent claims 1, 12, and 17** now defines a "patient registration kiosk system that allows patients to self-register for an appointment with a healthcare provider." The kiosk system includes, among other things, "an eligibility confirmation interface for forming an electronic communication link between the payor and the healthcare provider, wherein the payor responds to eligibility confirmation requests sent by the healthcare provider and the healthcare provider confirms the patient's eligibility for coverage by the payor ... over the electronic communication ink. This eligibility confirmation is "based on the identified insurance plan information" and is "prior to the appointment."

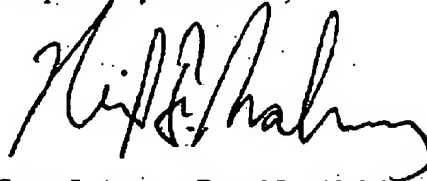
Examiner's Pass and Thomas indicated during the telephonic interview on January 26, 2005 that such amendments would render the claimed invention patentably distinct over the cited

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references of record, including Sugiyama and Burko. As such, the Applicant respectfully requests the Examiners to reconsider and withdraw each of these rejections, and to allow of all claims 1-29.

The Applicant believes the above amendments and remarks to be fully responsive, thereby placing this application in condition for allowance. Favorable action is solicited. The Examiner is kindly invited to contact the undersigned attorney by telephone, facsimile, or email for quickest resolution, if there are any remaining issues.

Respectfully submitted,



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